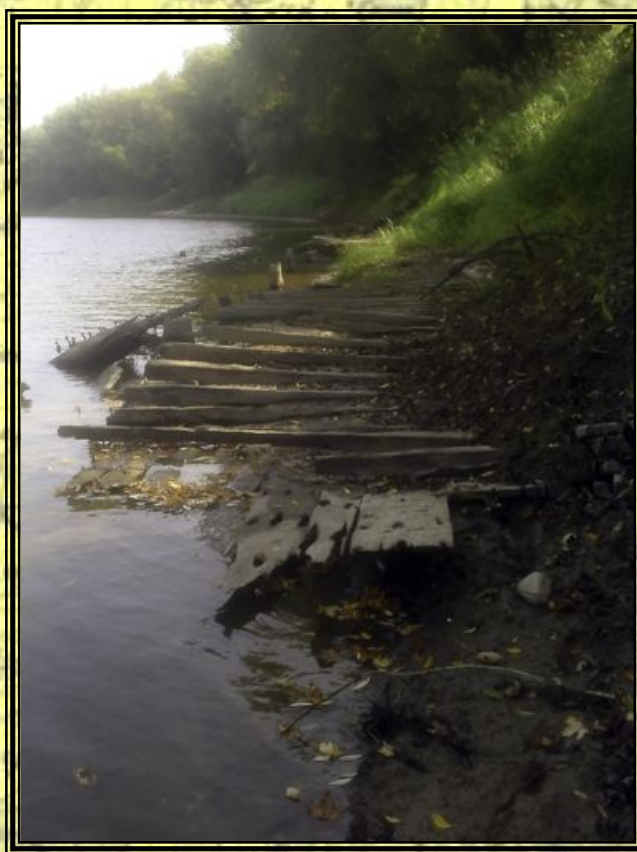


MARITIME HERITAGE MINNESOTA



Ann Merriman
Christopher Olson

Aitkin County Shipwrecks Project Report



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Ann Merriman, Christopher Olson, and Maritime Heritage Minnesota

Acknowledgments

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Cover: The *Andy Gibson* wreck as seen from the stern during low water conditions in 2009.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL &
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Introduction

Maritime Heritage Minnesota (MHM) conducted a side and down-imaging sonar survey of Aitkin County in August 2010 as part of the Mississippi River Aitkin County Survey (MRACS) Project. With the completion of the MRACS Project, the 104-mile portion of the Mississippi River in Aitkin County was the first section of any body of water in Minnesota to be systematically surveyed archaeologically using sonar. Prior to the MRACS Project, two steamboat wrecks sites had been identified within Aitkin County's portion of the Mississippi River, the *Andy Gibson* (21-AK0109) and *Swan* (21-AK0084) in Aitkin. MHM identified three maritime archaeological sites during the MRACS Project: the Mississippi Landing Railroad Spur and Bridge Remains Site (21-AK0115), the Mississippi Landing Logging Pier Site (21-AK0116), and the Sandy River Steamboat Crib Site (21-AK0117). MHM also identified 40 submerged anomalies that may be human-made objects during the survey. Six of these anomalies were targeted during the Aitkin County Shipwrecks (ACS) Project for further scrutiny and a further goal of this project was to determine the port side survival of the *Andy Gibson* wreck site using SCUBA. This report presents the findings of the ACS Project. For more information about MHM's Headwaters Mississippi archaeology and maritime history projects see the *2008 Nautical Archaeological Assessment of Steamer Wrecks Swan (21AK84) and Andy Gibson (21AK109) in Aitkin, Minnesota*, the *Mississippi River Aitkin County Survey Report*, the *Andy Gibson Excavation and NRHP Nomination*, and the *Andy Gibson Starboard Gunwale and Deck Excavation* report.

The Aitkin County Shipwrecks Project

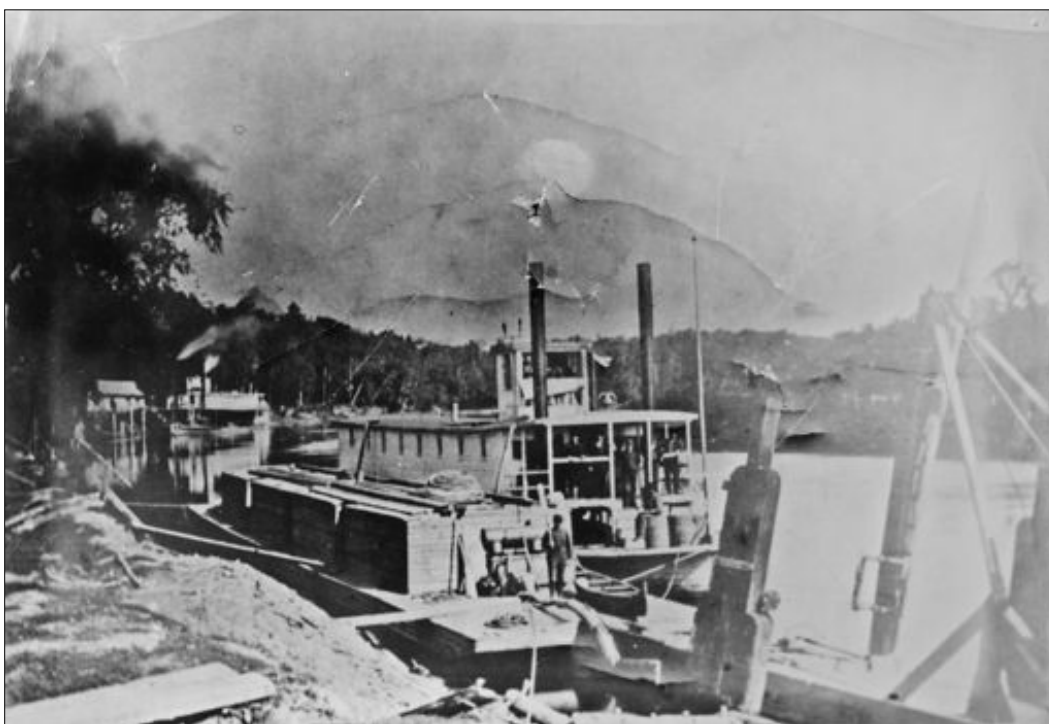
Maritime Heritage Minnesota designed the ACS Project to be completed within five workdays utilizing the MHM staff and two volunteer divers with the assumption that the river water would be high in late summer 2012. In July 2012 this was true, with the Mississippi and its tributaries over-flowing, exceeding flood stage. In Aitkin, anything about 12 feet is considered flood stage and the water rose to over 18.5 feet. Therefore, the MHM staff could not begin the work in July as was planned. During August the river kept dropping and by mid-September, the Mississippi River water levels were extremely low, providing the best conditions for investigating river silt and mud – and no volunteer help was required and scheduling was not an issue.

Captain George H. Houghton and His Steamboat Line

Pioneer steamboatman Captain George H. Houghton began his career on the Minnesota River in 1857 where he owned and operated the small 45-ton sidewheeler *Antelope* constructed in Kasota, MN. He ran his steamboat between St. Paul and Chaska until 1863. Houghton then owned and captained the 94-ton sidewheel steamer *Mollie Mohler* built in Carver, MN in 1864. Houghton worked on the Minnesota River through the 1865 commercial season (Hughes 1905, 144, 153, 158-159; Lytle and Holdcamper 1975, 11; *Shakopee Argus* 1864; Way 1994, 25). Commercial traffic on the Minnesota River fell drastically by 1870 due to the establishment of railroad lines west of the Twin Cities. At that time, Houghton moved his interests to the Headwaters Mississippi River and constructed the steamer *Pokegama* in Sauk Rapids. MHM must note here that the construction of *Pokegama* in Sauk Rapids is doubtful since the steamer would have to get over the waterfall in Little Falls to operate. There is no lock at Little Falls and portaging the steamboat seems unlikely – but we must add, not impossible. Regardless, Houghton launched the steamer in April 1870 and operated her between Little Falls and Pokegama Falls for a time, then between Aitkin and Grand Rapids. *Pokegama* burned while moored in Aitkin, in mid-November 1877 and was a complete loss. In early July 1878, Captain Houghton launched his new steamer *City of Aitkin* from Aitkin and ran her for over five years on a packet service to Grand Rapids until late October 1883 (*Aitkin Age* 1883f; *Brainerd Tribune* 1877, 1878a-b; *St. Cloud Journal* 1870; *Saint Paul Daily Pioneer* 1870).

Captain Houghton began construction on the shallow draft 85 foot-long and 14 foot wide sternwheel steamer *Fawn* in 1881 and she was launched in 1882. She joined the *City of Aitkin* to establish the ‘Houghton Line’ in service between Aitkin, Sandy Lake, and Grand Rapids (Hart 1952, 11). In August 1884 *Fawn* successfully undertook an unexpected outing down river from Aitkin “to Old Crow Wing [on] Friday afternoon in order to try the water, which was found to be of good depth. A party of about twenty-five gentlemen accepted the invitation of Capt. Houghton and accompanied him on the trip, enjoying it very much.” MHM surmises the reason behind the excursion – ‘to try the water’ with 25 men – was organized by Houghton in the hopes of expanding his business downriver and proving to potential clients that it was possible. Captain Houghton headed further downriver, this time to Brainerd where “with his steamer *Fawn* and barge, arrived in port at 12:30 o’clock Thursday, Aug. 7th. The captain reports a good stage of water all the way down, except at Flat Rapids, just above the city. He had

no trouble running French Rapids, there being plenty of water on them.” MHM is delighted with this report, particularly since the account mentions that *Fawn* was towing a barge along with her for extra cargo-carrying capacity. *Fawn* kept moving downriver, when Captain Houghton traveled all the way to Fort Ripley by late August. *Fawn* returned to her regular Aitkin-Grand Rapids service in early September (*Aitkin Age* 1884a-c). To MHM’s knowledge, no other large Headwaters Mississippi River steamer attempted to travel downriver to Crow Wing County and beyond.



Fawn at her Aitkin moorings next to a wharf. This mooring place could be located where the Aitkin County Campground and boat launch are currently situated or at the confluence of the Mississippi and Mud (Ripple) Rivers. *Andy Gibson* is in the background (HE5.11Fr2, Minnesota Historical Society, digitized by MHM).

Captain Christopher Columbus Sutton purchased *Fawn* from Captain Houghton in April 1885 (*Aitkin Age* 1885a). At the end of that year’s commercial season it was reported the *Fawn* had:

A long and most successful business season...She started on her first trip April 28th and has made a trip each week since, several times having made two round trips per week. The *Fawn* is 85 feet long and fourteen feet beam and when loaded draws too much water for the low stages on the Upper Mississippi. To obviate this fault and also give her a greater tonnage, Capt. Sutton has drawn her from the water, and has begun extensive alterations upon her. She will be cut in two from bow to stern and widened five feet which will also necessitate her being lengthened ten feet to retain good proportions. She will be at once dismantled and an elegant cabin built and when thus thoroughly remodeled, refitted, and furnished she will carry forty tons of freight and seventy cabin passengers and draw thus loaded only twelve inches of water. The present powerful engines will be all sufficient to move her at a rate of speed which will be all that is desired and her capacity being thus enlarged she will be prepared to enter the river trade at the opening of navigation next spring in a manner that will enable her to come in for her share of the trade. The rapid settlement of the fine lands between Aitkin and Grand Rapids makes the trade of the upper river greater each year and it will continue to expand for years to come (*Aitkin Age* 1885b).

Fawn operated between Aitkin and Grand Rapids through the 1893 commercial season. The problem-ridden year of 1894 for *Fawn* showed her lying on the bottom of the Mississippi River near the confluence of the Mud (Ripple) River in mid-April after the winter ice had cleared – she was showing her age. *Fawn* was raised by mid-June but sunk again by mid-August, and raised again later in the month. In early November north of Jacobson, “*Fawn* struck a snag in the river just below the mouth of the Swan [River] on Thursday, and sank in the channel”. To MHM’s knowledge, *Fawn* remained sunk in the Headwaters Mississippi River from this point on, apparently with her upper deck removed to ensure her remains were not a hazard to navigation. Further, it has been reported that in 1942 the wreck was blown apart by dynamite in an attempt to retrieve iron for the war effort (*Aitkin Age* 1894a, 1894c-f, Trunt 1993, 100).

Steamboat *Fawn* and Mississippi Landing

In the morning of 16 September 2012 MHM launched the research boat at Jacobson Campground and headed south to the Mississippi Landing area, the location of two maritime archaeological sites recognized during the MRACS Project in 2010. The pilings that comprise both sites (21-AK0115, 21-AK0116) were more exposed due to the low water conditions than they were in 2010. MHM recorded sonar imagery of the area and investigated the two anomalies (MRACS 237 and 238) that might have been the *Fawn* wreck site near the mouth of the Swan River and the area further south.



MHM's Christopher Olson operating the boat at the Mississippi Landing site location north of Jacobson during the ACS Project.



The Mississippi Landing Logging Pier Site (21-AK0116) during the ACS Project. The pilings are more visible when compared to the 2010 MRACS Project..



Part of the Mississippi Landing Railroad Spur and Bridge Remains site (21-AK0115) during low water conditions. This section shows the remains of the bridge supports in the river channel and the riverbank.

Upon reviewing the 2010 MRACS sonar footage and re-visiting the area in 2012, MHM has determined that Anomalies 237 and 238 are not the remains of the steamer *Fawn*. Further, if the remains of the *Fawn* survive in any fashion, they are buried deep enough in the silt that a sub-bottom profiler (if she is in deeper water) or ground penetrating radar (if she is in a siltbank exposed during low water) would be required to locate her – probably south of the Mississippi Landing Logging Pier Site (21-AK0116) between the mouth of the Swan River and the town of Jacobson. MHM took several photographs of 21-AK0115 and 21-AK0116, allowing a more precise count of surviving pilings that comprise the sites, and filed an updated Minnesota Archaeological Site Form with the OSA. Lastly, before MHM landed the boat at Jacobson Campground, a sonar pass was made approximately .5 miles north of launch site to re-investigate Anomaly 242, an object that MHM called a ‘boat-shaped feature’ in the MRACS Report. The object was no longer there, indicating that it was probably a submerged tree that had moved, shifted, or washed away during high water.

Steamboat *City of Aitkin*/George H. Houghton

To replace the burned *Pokegama*, Captain Houghton constructed the steamer *City of Aitkin* (mentioned above) in Aitkin, launching her in early July 1878. The new sternwheeler was 120 feet long with a 22-foot beam and advertised weekly trips to Pokegama Falls for the remainder of the 1878 season (*Brainerd Tribune* 1878a-b; Hart 1952, 11). For the next few years, the *City of Aitkin* operated on the Headwaters Mississippi River between Aitkin and Grand Rapids and rated a mention in Captain Glazier’s canoe trip on 4 August 1881:

“We met the *City of Aitkin*, a small steamboat, late in the afternoon, on its way from Aitkin to Grand Rapids. This pioneer craft was commanded by Captain Houghton of the former place, and deserves special mention as the first boat propelled by steam which we had thus far seen in the descent of the river. The clatter of the stern-wheel, much puffing and blowing; followed by the report of several shots fired by sporting passengers, betokened the approach of this wonder of the Upper Mississippi. The captain of the *Aitkin* and his gallant crew must have been well advised of our movements, for, as soon as they had reached a point opposite the one we had taken on the shore, they saluted with several rounds of cheers, supplemented by a general discharge of firearms. This compliment was reciprocated on our part by three cheers and a...yell for Captain Houghton (Glazier 1887, 131-132).

Low water conditions throughout 1883 caused navigational problems for the *City of Aitkin* and not only because of submerged hazards such as rapids and snags – logs from the northern logging camps were not moving due to the lack of water and clogged up the river channel at times. The low water also caused the steamer to sink at her moorings in late September when she hit bottom and began to list. She was raised, repaired, and re-entered river service within weeks. However, within two weeks of her return to service, she had to off-load a heavy cargo to the *Fawn*, a vessel with a lighter draft that could operate more easily in the low water, so that the goods could reach Grand Rapids from Aitkin (*Aitkin Age* 1883a-e). *City of Aitkin* left service after the 1883 commercial season, abandoned in the river at Aitkin.

The Mississippi River Transportation Company (also known as W.E. Neal & Co. of Grant Rapids, principals W.E. Neal of Grand Rapids and W.H. Eustis of Minneapolis) purchased the *City of Aitkin* from Captain George Houghton in 1886. The boat’s former

engineer, A.A. Storer, was hired to restore her to working condition. Storer found her hull to be in excellent condition, while he re-built her superstructure and fitted her with new machinery manufactured by D.M. Swain of Stillwater, delivered by the railroad in late July. It was also noted “a fine stick of timber thirty-six feet long, to be used for an engine bed, for the *Aitkin City*, passed through town yesterday for the levee”. The reconstructed steamer measured 115 feet long, 21 feet in the beam, had a 14-inch draft, and could carry 100 tons of cargo. Unofficially referred to as *Aitkin City* by the local press, she was launched on 1 September by her old captain and builder, Captain George Houghton. She took her first trip to Grand Rapids on 7 September, returning on 10 September. By mid-October the steamer was known as the *George H. Houghton* and she remained busy throughout the 1886 commercial season. During one last trip to Grand Rapids, where she was meant to spend the winter, she became frozen-in just above Crooked Rapids, roughly halfway to her destination (*Aitkin Age* 1886a-k, 1887a).

George H. Houghton regularly carried freight and passengers on the Headwaters Mississippi River during 1887 and 1888. In November 1888, the steamboat attempted another ‘too-late-in-the-season-run’ and was stuck in ice near John Clark’s Landing 20 miles north of Aitkin for the winter. Her perishable cargo was placed in Clark’s cellar for safekeeping. On 26 March 1889, the steamer burned to her waterline and sank. It was noted that the steamboat was partially insured and it was suspected that the vessel was a victim of arson (*Aitkin Age* April 23, 1887a-o, 19 May 1888a-c, 1888e-i, 1889).

During the afternoon of 16 September 2012, MHM launched the research boat at Waldeck Landing north of Aitkin in order to investigate MRACS Anomalies 133 and 134. MHM determined that since the location of the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* was vaguely described as burned “20 miles above Aitkin” (Aitkin County Park Commission 1977, 2) by one source, these anomalies required further scrutiny to determine their nature. The difference in river conditions from 2010 to 2012 was obvious in the 2.5 miles MHM traveled northward from Waldeck since the rapids that cover nearly this entire area were consistently exposed on the port and starboard sides of the boat along the way. Anomaly 133 was encountered first and was completely exposed because of low water – it was a group of large stones and part of the rapids. Anomaly 134 was also a disappointment since it was a large rocky sandbank.

Anomaly 133, exposed during low water conditions. This group of boulders, along with features in the river channel, created an anomaly that resembled a boat shape.



On 7 October 2012, MHM received permission from the landowner at the former location of John Clark's Landing to access the Mississippi River in order to search for evidence of the steamer wreck. Historical accounts claimed the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* wreck was often exposed during low water. An Aitkin County resident recounted "the boat *George Houghton*...was burned there about 300 feet above this portage [near John Clark's Landing]. It was frozen in there on its last trip in the fall. The story is that so much was taken off the boat during the winter that it was burned to hide evidence. Several say they have seen remains of the boat when the river is low" The 2010 MRACS sonar did not reveal any anomalies in this area that suggested a wreck, therefore MHM conducted a visual survey of the north side of the river with nothing found. MHM then swam across the river using fins and snorkels to investigate the south side riverbank and the several silt banks and rocky areas located there. The river depth on the south side of the river was very low from the bank to three-quarters across the channel above 'Clark's Cut-Off' that "used to be a portage which the river cut through in 1903" (Sanford 1948). After a thorough visual search of the area where the cut-off began and a distance upriver, the only evidence MHM found of a possible wreck site was one fire-burned brick. If *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* still exists under the siltbanks at this location, a sub-bottom profiler or ground penetrating radar will be required to locate her.



A view of the location of Clark's Landing, looking north. MHM staff swam across the river at this point to access the south side riverbank to search for evidence of the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* wreck.



Left: The Headwaters Mississippi looking downriver toward the northwest and the site of Clark's Landing. This area is 300 feet above the cut-off where the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* reportedly burned.

Right: Olson conducting a visual search of the southern side of the river; the photograph is looking upriver toward the southeast.



Left: MHM located only one burned brick fragment in the area where the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* reportedly burned and sank – no other cultural remains that might be linked to a wreck were found.

Right: One railroad tie was found in the river channel nearby, the only other evidence of historical cultural remains in the area.



Left: Part of the oxbow of the Mississippi River that was cut off from the main river channel when 'Clark's Portage' broke through in 1903.

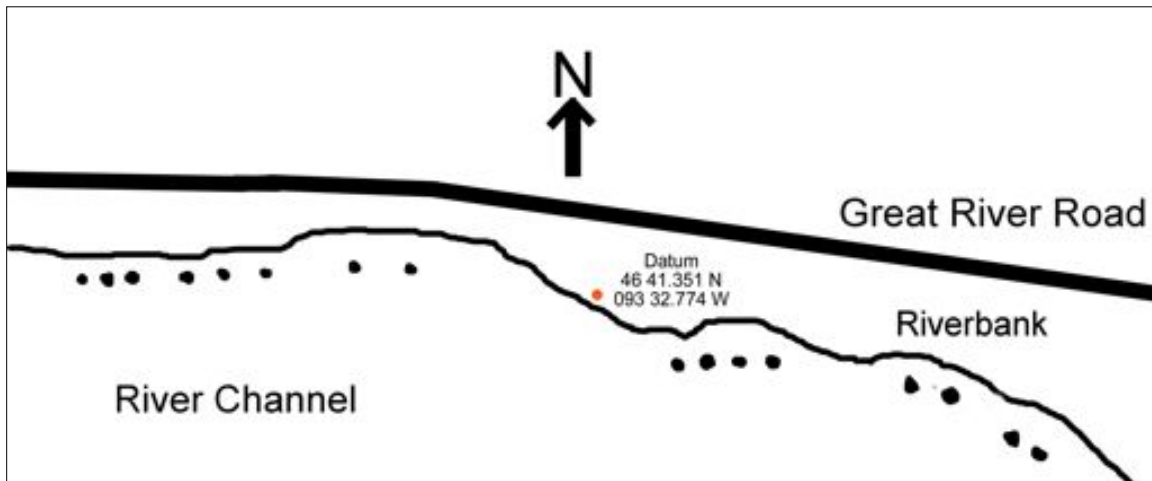
Right: This hollowed-out log was located by MHM in the oxbow created by 'Clark's Cut-Off'. This type of find is challenging since it looks like a dugout canoe, but is probably just part of a rotted tree.

Tripp Landing (21-AK0123)

During MHM's review of the 2010 MRACS sonar footage for the ACS Project, it was mentioned in the research notebook that some possible pilings were seen at the location of Tripp Landing near a cut-off that had been a portage during the steamboat era. An Aitkin County resident witnessed the river pushing through at this point and recounted the event in 1948. "The next bend in the river was on the old Tripp place...called the Tripp portage...This portage went out in 1942. This is of course modern history but I saw that. Went down twice a day at first and later once a day to watch it go out. It surely was interesting altho [sic] we knew it meant a lot to the farmer owning that farm. All the land was cut off and he soon sold it and moved away" (Sanford 1948). On 3 October 2012, MHM took the Great River Road to the location of Tripp Landing and documented 16 surviving pilings that are the remains of Tripp Landing, a place where steamboats stopped for decades. It was even noted in an 1888 newspaper "Frank Tripp came down form the claim on the steamer yesterday" (*Aitkin Age* 1888d). MHM filed a Minnesota Archaeological Site Form with the OSA and received a site number for Tripp Landing (21-AK0123).



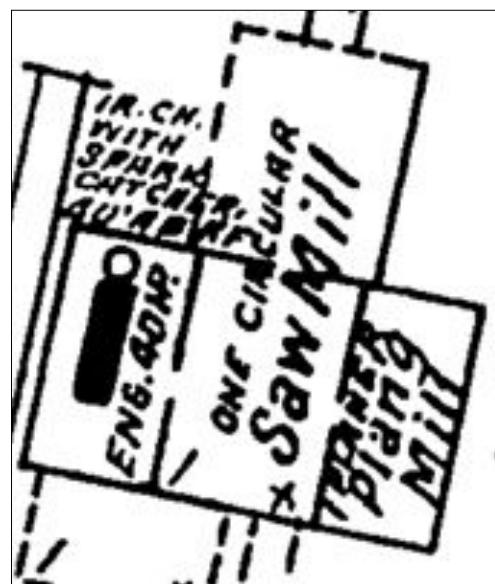
Tripp Landing, on the north side of the river, looking to the west.



MHM's sketch of the pilings that comprise the Tripp Landing site (21-AK0123).

Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and MacDonald Mill and Landing (21-AK0124)

In late April 1892 the machinery for the Burton & Anderson Saw and Planing Mill was loaded onto the steamer *Andy Gibson* at Cedar Creek, 12 miles below Aitkin, for delivery to the mill site. The September 1892 Sanborn Map indicates that the mill was located at the end of a railroad spur with lumber storage piles along the track and a platform behind the mill. Sanborn noted the mill had one circular saw mill and a planer that were operated by a 40 horse power engine fueled by sawdust and shavings. By mid-May 1894, the mill was owned by the partnership of Hodgeden & McDonald. In March 1895 a wanigan – a houseboat used for cooking and supplies during logging runs – owned by the Northern Boom Company caught fire on the north side of the Mississippi River from the mill, but caused no damage to the business across the river (*Aitkin Age* 1892a-b, 1894b, 1895a).



The Burton and Anderson Saw and Planing Mill as documented by the Sanborn Insurance Company in September 1892 (Sanborn Map Company 1892).

In early June 1894, the new steamer *Swan* owned by J. M. Markham, was working on the Headwaters Mississippi River. In late June 1895, *Swan* and her barge were commissioned to transport lumber from the Hodgeden & McDonald Mill to Sandy River and Sandy Lake where the US Government was constructing a dam. It was noted that *Swan* made her way from Sandy River to Aitkin in 11 hours on her return home (*Aitkin Age* 1895b). The 1898 Sanborn Map indicates that the Hodgeden & McDonald Mill remained as it was mapped in 1892, although an iron swing bridge was now in place across the Mississippi River next to the mill. The 1902 Sanborn Map indicates that the company had expanded its stores of cut lumber to the east, with large piles awaiting shipment, and a large shed had been constructed near the river. By 1908 it is apparent that the company was no longer in business.

This steamer *Swan* newspaper ad from 1895 is informative in several ways, indicating the steamer had been sold to W. Chase by J. M. Markham, that she was conducting packet and excursion service, that she had established warehouse space and moorings at the Northern Pacific facility, the names of her crew, and whom her shipping agents were in Aitkin (*Aitkin Age* 1895c).

The Steamer Swan.

Plies between Aitkin and Sandy lake and up river points.

FREIGHT and PASSENGERS.

Arrangements for Transporting Freight can be made with Hugh McEwan at the AGE Office or W. S. Cluff at the Clark House.

The Swan has excellent freight storage facilities at its Docks in the Northern Pacific Warehouse.

Excursion trips made as the Public desires.

WM. HAY, Engineer. W. CHASE, Prop.
RAY HAY, Pilot.

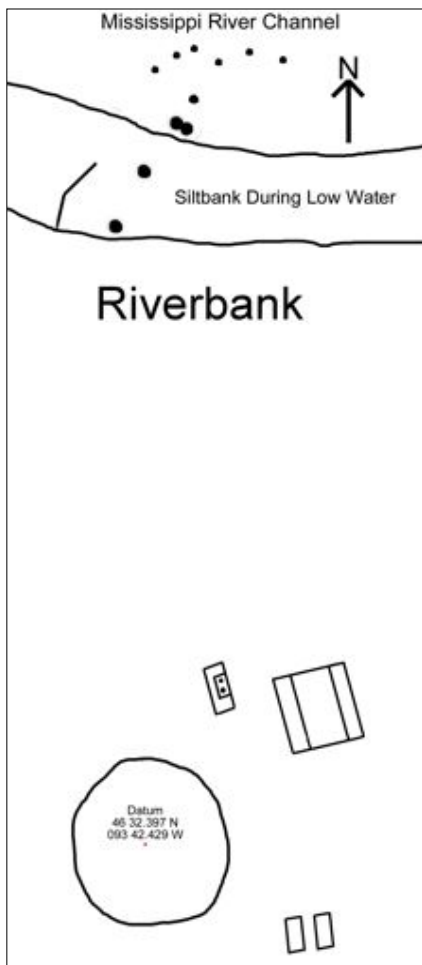


Left: The Hodgeden and McDonald Saw and Planing Mill in January 1898 that also indicates the location of the new swing bridge across the Mississippi River (Sanborn Insurance Company 1898).
 Right: The swing bridge over the Mississippi River and floating cut timber near the Hodgeden and McDonald Saw and Planing Mill. Note the company's lumber shoot on the left side of the image (Klee and Lindquist 1971, 41).

During the 2010 MRACS Project MHM noted possible pilings just upriver from the Punteney Bridge and County Highway 1 in Aitkin, but the sonar image was very 'busy' due to a large amount of snags evident at the location and pin-pointing any cultural remains was not possible. On 17 September 2012, while MHM was boating on the river to investigate the possible location of the steamer wreck *Walter Taylor*, several pilings were exposed during the low water conditions. On 7 October, MHM conducted a terrestrial survey of the area and located the remains of the saw and planing mill that once occupied the land, including the base and the remains of its log chute. MHM filed a Minnesota Archaeological Site Form with the OSA and received a site number for the Burton & Anderson/Hodgeden & McDonald Saw and Planing Mill, 21-AK0124.

Below: MHM's sketch of the Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and McDonald Landing and Mill site.

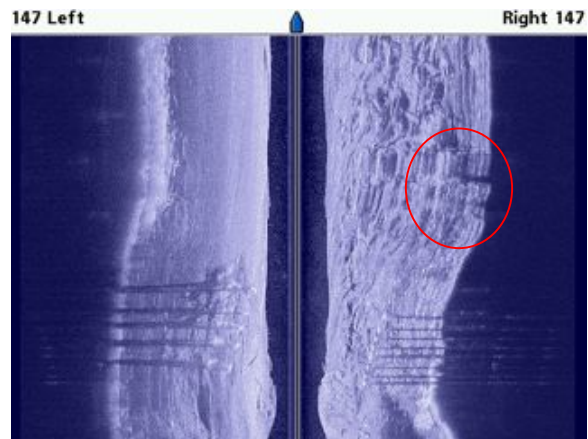
Right: The lumber pilings and concrete foundations of the mill.





This metal circle was part of the mill complex.

In this 2010 sonar image the supports of the current Puntene Bridge are seen at the bottom of the graphic. The Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and McDonald Mill and Landing pilings (circled in red) are mixed in with river detritus but do cast shadows to the riverbank. This kind of detritus makes sonar images recorded in dynamic river environments difficult to interpret.



Pilings and a piece of metal rail are the only evidence of the landing area for the mill; note the amount of snags mixed in with the pilings.

Steamer Wreck *Swan* Assessment (21-AK0084)

On 26 September 2012, MHM conducted a brief visual inspection of the *Swan* wreck in the Headwaters Mississippi River near its confluence with the Ripple River. One issue noticed by MHM was damage to the wreck's already-worn keelson and two planks that have suffered from vandalism. One plank may have been displaced from the wreck by ice, but another plank had been dragged from the river and dumped on a siltbank – an obvious sign of vandalism. MHM filed a site form update with the office of the State Archaeologist.



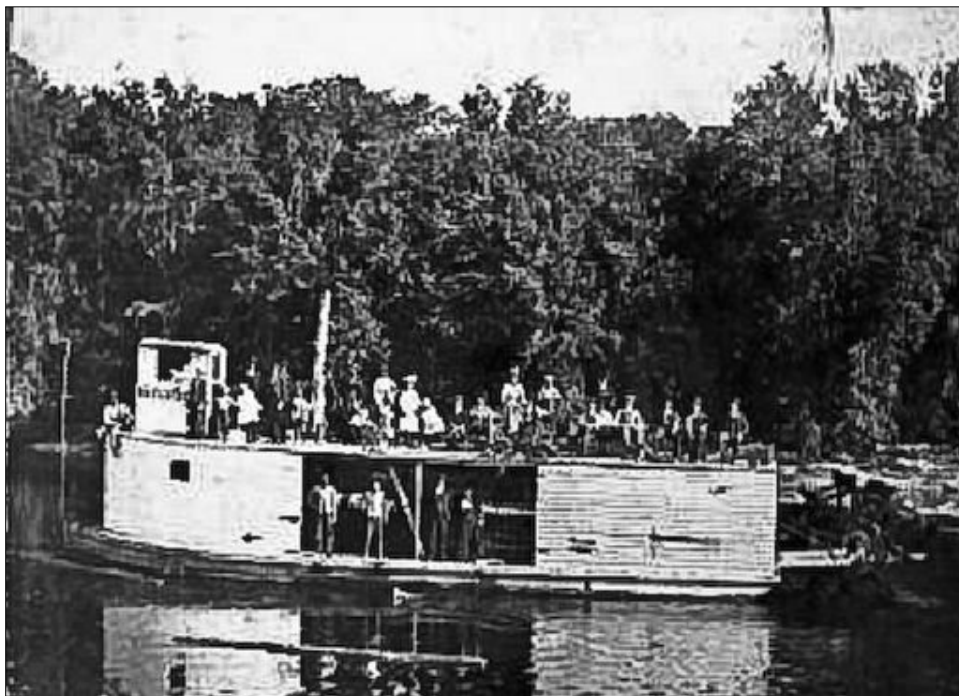
The small broken timber at the 90-degree angle is the *Swan*'s keelson, intact during MHM's last wreck assessment.



These two timbers have been displaced from the *Swan* wreck. The timber in the foreground was dragged from the river by an unknown vandal – drag marks were still evident at the time of this assessment.

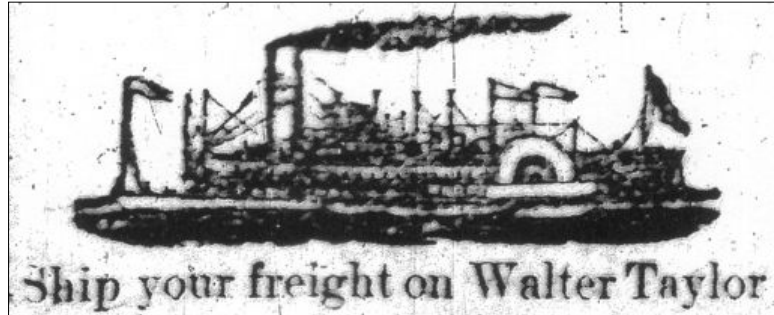
Steamer *Walter Taylor* and The Red Mill Wreck (21-AK0122)

The first news of the steamer *Walter Taylor* appeared in late July 1895 when it was reported the "Cluff Bros. and James Taylor are building a steamboat in Hodgeden & McDonald's mill yard, which is to ply on the Mississippi between Aitkin and Grand Rapids, also below Aitkin if business will warrant it. The boat is to be 15x50 ft. in dimensions, and will handily carry 50 tons of freight. The work of building her is under the personal supervision of Mr. Taylor, who, we understand, will captain her when finished. The work will be pushed with all possible dispatch, and the boat be completed in time for the fall traffic". The hull was launched on 17 August and the progress on the vessel's completion was of interest. It was reported "Capt. James Taylor is rapidly pushing the work on the new steamer *Palace*. The engine is in position, the hurricane deck is built, the pilot house erected, and the captain will soon be in a position to clew up the mizzen mast, splice the main brace and set sail for Grand Rapids". While the sailing ship metaphor is imaginative, the reference to the steamer *Palace* is more interesting, since *Walter Taylor* was initially known by that name. The steamer was completed by mid-September 1895, and "Capt. Taylor took the *Palace* for a warming up spin last Wednesday. Quite a delegation of citizens, including Hon. Muck Wa Ninne, of Sandy Lake, went along and the boat behaved very nicely". Two days later, "the *Palace* started on her initial trip to Sandy Lake yesterday morning, with Raymond Hay at the wheel, Capt. Taylor on the quarter deck and Rosey acting as ballast amidships. Capt. Taylor scorns all evil omens as he started on Friday the 13th day of the month". By mid-September, "Cluff & Taylor's new steamboat was duly christened...by having her name painted on the pilot house by the artistic brush of Frank J. Smith. She will hereafter be known as the *Walter Taylor*" (*Aitkin Age* 1895d-h).



Sternwheeler *Walter Taylor* on the Headwaters Mississippi River (Aitkin County Historical Society).

This ad is an example of the generic representations of steamboats in old newspapers. *Walter Taylor* is not the majestic-looking sidewheeler depicted here (*Aitkin Age* 1895i).



Walter Taylor opened the Headwaters Mississippi River navigation season in 1896 with a trip downriver to Brainerd to pick up two wanigans for transport to Grand Rapids under consignment of the Northern Boom Company. During this trip, apparently *Walter Taylor* became the first larger steamer to travel under the new swing bridge at Aitkin, with the County Commissioner supervising the mechanics. In early September, *Walter Taylor* emulated the sinking of the *City of Aitkin* due to low water conditions. The steamer was moored on the north side of the Mississippi River and she slowly settled on her side as the water lowered. It was determined she was “moored too close to the shore” but would be righted and over-hauled before her return to service. *Walter Taylor* operated regularly throughout 1897, with service to Sandy Lake, Grand Rapids, and even pleasure excursions with music provided. Once again, in early October 1897, *Walter Taylor* sank at her moorings in 12 feet of water near Sandy Lake. Her captain and crew off-loaded her cargo safely – including a Jersey cow – and raised her in two days for a return trip to Aitkin. The steamer continued serving the people of Aitkin and lower Itasca Counties throughout 1898 and 1899, even being chartered by local engineer D. M. Falconer who held a contract to construct a bridge (*Aitkin Age*, 5 September 1896a-b, 1897a-l, 1898a-b, 1899a-b; *Aitkin Republican* 1899a-b).

Mentions of *Walter Taylor* working on the Headwaters Mississippi River disappear from the local newspapers after October 1899 and news of her abandonment was recorded 49 years later. Aitkin resident John Schroeder was an eyewitness to the slow sinking of *Walter Taylor*, according to his wife. Mr. Schroeder worked at Gyde’s Mill, located downriver from the confluence of the Mississippi and Ripple Rivers. Mrs. Schroeder reported, “my husband worked at Gyde’s mill and saw the *Walter Taylor* sink at the mouth of the Mud [Ripple] River. It sprang a leak and Mr. Cluff went down every day for a month to bail it out, hoping they could save it, but it sank and in a few years was covered with sand”. Another account by Mrs. C. H. Eggers claimed, “The boat was sunk & left there or rather never rebuilt. It was named *Walter Taylor*”. Mrs. Eggers does not pinpoint the boat’s location but one newspaper mention of *Walter Taylor* is particularly interesting since she was “tied up at the spot where Knox’s warehouse stood before the cyclone struck it. The steamer had in tow the boom company’s wanigan containing Foreman Dan McMahon and crew, who will take down a drive from the upper river. The steamboat left the same day” (*Aitkin Republican* 1898; Eggers 1948; Schroeder 1948).

Due to the above mentions that reference the possible location of the wreck of the steamer *Walter Taylor*, MHM was particularly interested in the section of river near the confluence of the Mississippi and Ripple Rivers where the Knox warehouse once stood – and consequently about 200 yards downriver from the location of the wreck *Swan*.

During the 2010 MRACS Project, MHM identified two anomalies, close to each other, near the confluence of the Mississippi and Ripple Rivers. On 17 September 2012 MHM boated to MRACS Anomalies 20 and 21 only to determine that they were not the remains of the wreck. However, in 2008, MHM had conducted a walking survey of this area and located some cultural remains in the form of small artifacts, evidence of a mooring place, burned brick concentrations, and worked wooden planks during low water conditions. On 26 September 2012 MHM, with permission from the landowner at this spot on the Mississippi and Ripple Rivers, accessed the area by land. Olson surveyed the river by snorkel from the confluence of the two rivers to roughly 200 yards downriver and Merriman photographed the area examined in 2008 prior to opening a test trench – again, in low water conditions. Within 20 minutes of clearing silt from a plank and a smaller timber that was wedged above a large snag that was protruding out of the siltbank, Merriman located what appeared to be a floor – part of a boat frame that is attached to the bottom of a hull.



MHM saw this beam, and a small beam in the water next to it, in 2008 during low water conditions.



MHM also saw these two beams with a log – in this context, a snag – wedged underneath it.

By the end of the workday, MHM had uncovered what appeared to be a wreck with bottom hull planking with four floors attached to them, as well as ceiling planking. MHM returned the next day and extended the L-shaped test trench toward the west in search of a gunwale – and located it within one hour. Until MHM located the gunwale, the identification of the site as a wreck remained in question since it could have been part of a building that had washed into the river, maybe even from the Knox warehouse that was reportedly destroyed by a tornado. However, the remains that MHM discovered has a gunwale with two iron U-bolts that that were used as cleats or as attachments for hogging chains.

MHM documented the portion of the wreck exposed in the test trench, established a datum, and filed a Minnesota Archaeological Site Form with the OSA and received a site number for the Red Mill Wreck (21-AK0122). The reasoning behind the name 'Red Mill Wreck' references the informal name given to the G. W. Knox Saw and Planing Mill. In early September 1890, "the spur track to the red mill and the old steamboat landing is completed and ready for business". Also, the steamer *Andy Gibson* used to moor at this site prior to that time since she "stove a hole in her side on her down trip from Sandy Lake, but the heroic work of her crew saved her from sinking. She lies at her old dock near the red mill". MHM determined that the Knox Mill was also known as the Red Mill in a newspaper article written by G. W. Knox's son Walter F. Knox. Knox wrote that his father and uncle had a disagreement while at the mill and he referred to his father as "G. W. Knox owner of the "Red Mill" at the mouth of the Mud River" (*Aitkin Age* 1890; Knox 1960). Therefore, until MHM can conduct further research on the site, what cannot be determined is whether the wreck is *Walter Taylor*, another steamer, a wanigan hull, or possibly a flatboat/ferry. Initial indications suggest the wreck has a very shallow depth of hold, suggesting she is barge-like and might not be a steamer hull.



MHM's test trench that exposed the Red Mill Wreck. Four floors are seen along with bottom hull planking, the broken end of which is resting on a snag wedged under the wreck.



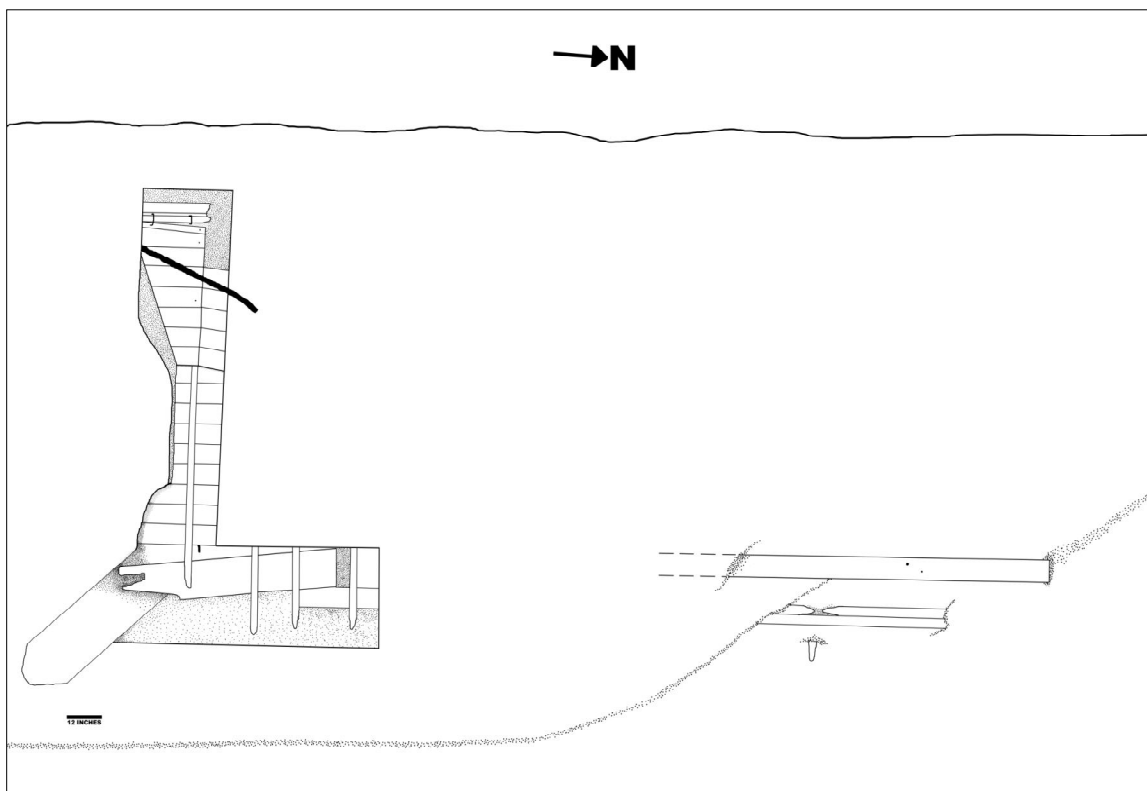
The northern end of the trench as it looks in reference to the beams in the water. In 2008 the beams in the water were completely exposed due to lower water conditions at that time..



Left: A view of the test trench facing east. The long beam that disappears under part of the wreck is a floor, part of the vessel's frame. The planks it disappears under are either ceiling planking or deck planking – or both. It appears the depth of hold of this wreck is shallow, a characteristic that suggests she is a flatboat or wanigan. The function of the metal rod protruding out of the trench wall and crossing over the wreck is unknown at this time.



The wreck's gunwale with two iron attachments for hogging chains or they may act as cleats.



The Red Mill Wreck (21-AK0122). Probing in the area to the left (north) of the trench indicates that the wreck extends at least 30-40 feet in that direction and it extends some distance to the right (south) as well.

***Andy Gibson* Port Side Investigation (21-AK0109)**

MHM has been assessing and documenting the *Andy Gibson* Wreck Site since August 2008 and with the assistance of Minnesota's National Register Archaeologist David Mather, successfully nominated the site to the National Register of Historic Places in August 2012. The ACS Project goal for the *Andy Gibson* site was to determine the extent of survival of the wreck's port (left) side, part of the site that is consistently underwater even in low water conditions. In brief, the *Andy Gibson* wreck site is a partially dry nautical archaeological site that has two components – the steamer wreck herself and a 'dry dock' platform constructed under her to prevent her from grounding and tilting during low water conditions, like the *City of Aitkin* before her and *Walter Taylor* years later. The presence of the dry dock platform adds a component to the site that unique in the United States. Further, MHM has classified the site as 'partially dry' because the starboard (right) side of the wreck is embedded in the riverbank with several feet of clay/mud/dirt encasing her. MHM has sunk four test trenches in the riverbank to document the gunwale and internal construction of the hull. In one trench the hull is completely intact with decking in place and in another trench she is nearly intact but with some decking missing. The area with missing deck allowed access to the inner hull and MHM was able to document the wreck's construction attributes¹.

¹For more information on the maritime history of the *Andy Gibson*, and MHM's documentation and analysis of the *Andy Gibson* wreck site, see MHM's *Andy Gibson Starboard Gunwale and Deck Excavation*, *Andy Gibson Excavation and NRHP Nomination Report*, *Mississippi River Aitkin County Survey Report*, and the *2008 Nautical Archaeological Assessment of Steamer Wrecks Swan (21-AK0084) and Andy Gibson (21-AK0109) in Aitkin, Minnesota*.

On 17-19 and 27 September and 3 October 2012, MHM examined the port side of the *Andy Gibson* wreck site and determined her parameters using snorkels, SCUBA, underwater digital video, and triangulation. MHM's research plan for the 2012 season centered on questions formulated during the previous seasons of work, particularly a sonar image recorded during 2010's MRACS Project. Before the project, MHM postulated that certain construction attributes of the wreck might have survived in the river channel; this work determined their presence or absence. In particular, one attribute in the sonar image located in the port stern area of the wreck site was interesting; MHM hoped it was a cylinder timber, a large wooden beam that held the steamer's sternwheel. Upon investigation by SCUBA it has been determined the attribute is not a cylinder timber but a portion of the port side skeg, part of the hull that supports a vessel's rudder. *Andy Gibson's* port side and master rudder were illegally removed from the wreck in 1968 while the starboard side rudder was illegally removed in 2006.



MHM's Olson paused during a dive on the port side of the *Andy Gibson* wreck near a cradle piling.



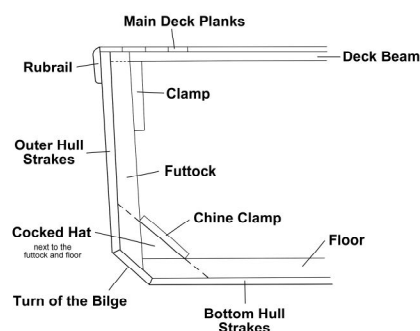
Olson filming the port side of the wreck.



MHM's Merriman investigating the bow area of the *Andy Gibson*.

Another question MHM had about the extent of the port side survival of the wreck was whether the gunwale was intact. The port side exists throughout the length of the wreck, but only to the turn of the bilge; the side of the vessel above that point is gone. The condition of the surviving structural components – cocked hats, frames, futtocks, and chine clamp – show extreme wear from over 110 years of erosion by the river current, silt movement, snag damage, and ice action. These components survive – but just barely in many areas. During this work, MHM was able to determine that the stempost still exists but has shifted away from the wreck. The keelson survives in the bow and the deadwood is still attached to it. Originally the deadwood would butt up against the stempost but they are now separated. It was observed that a number of iron fasteners that hold the floors to the bottom hull planking have fragmented ceiling planking attached to them. Further, some intact ceiling planking was recorded on the port side's forward quarter. Another question MHM answered during this work is the number of platform pilings that are extant in the river channel: 15. Lastly, MHM discovered evidence of *Andy Gibson*'s logging past with the presence of a logging chain in the bilge near the bow. MHM took the *Andy Gibson* data collected during the ACS Project and augmented the existing site plan and filed a site update with the OSA.

This profile of the starboard side of the *Andy Gibson* wreck indicates the proper position and shape of the steamer's original construction. This diagram is a useful tool for identifying the surviving – but damaged – structural components on the wreck's port side.

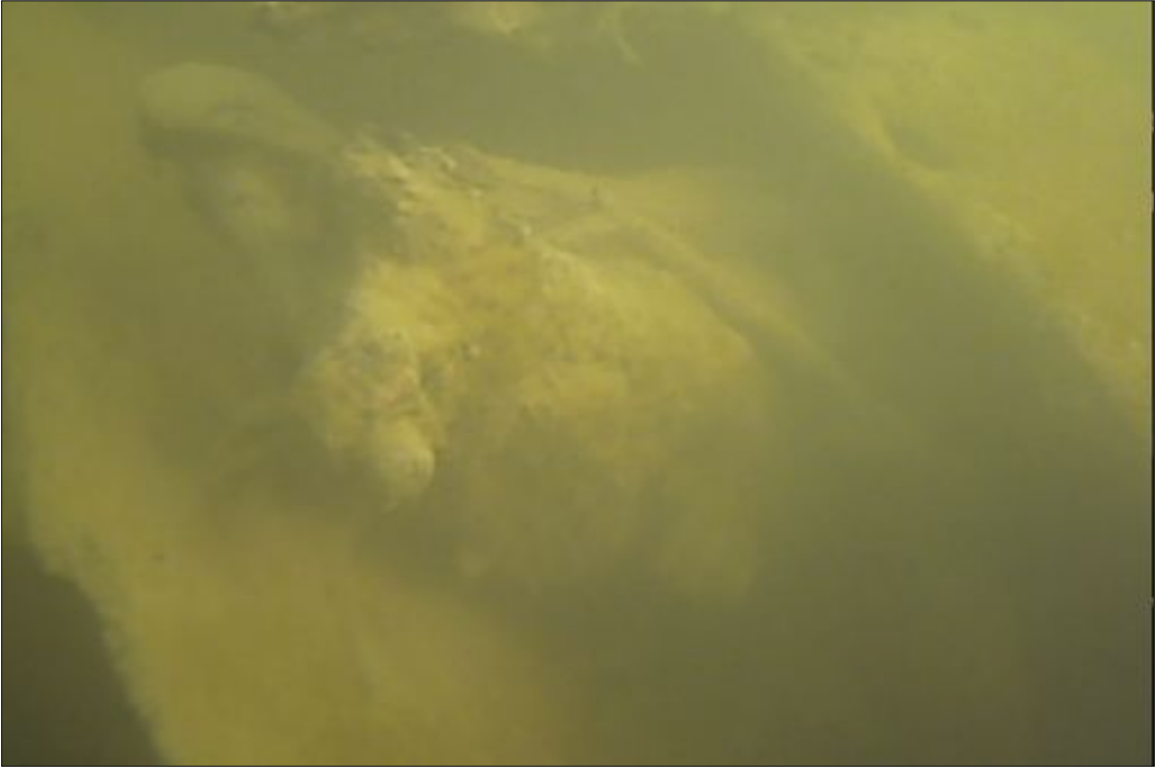




The remains of the *Andy Gibson* stempost.



A futtock with iron fasteners.



The remains of a futtock positioned between two cocked hats.



Two cocked hats remain in place with an iron fastener connecting them; the futtock between them has eroded away.



The angular design of the cocked hat is easily seen above.



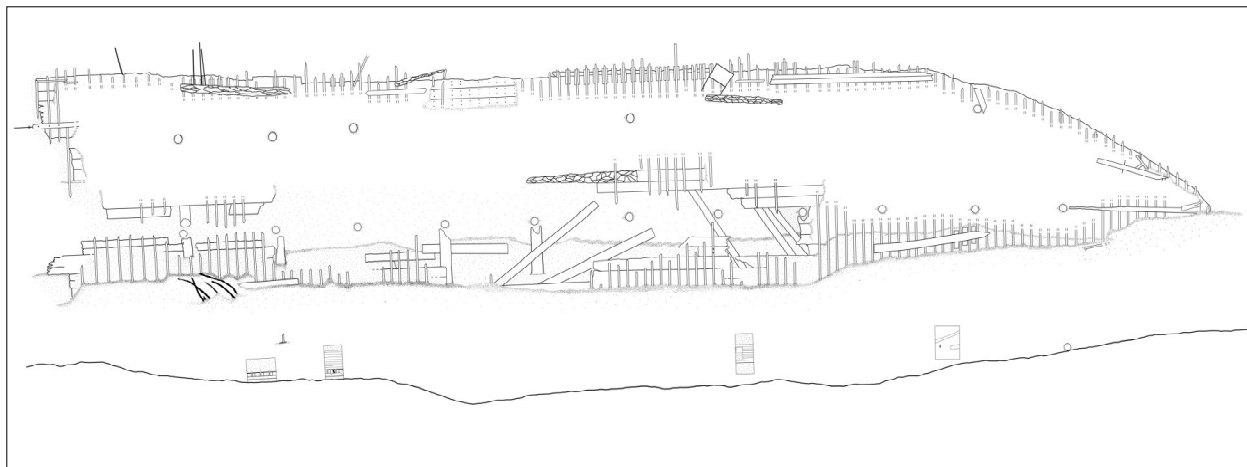
A futtock that may have evidence of burning.



An iron fastener with a bolt that held the chine clamp in place.



Two cocked hats with the remains of a futtock visible, along with the iron fasteners that held the chine clamp in place.



MHM's *Andy Gibson* site plan incorporating data collection from 2008-2012. The bow is to the right and the stern is to the left. The wreck is 132 feet long and 35.5 feet wide at her widest point. The four long objects with texture are snags stuck on or under the wreck. The long, thin object with several holes running down it is a metal post for a road sign and the small rectangular object with legs is an old metal sign.

Recommendations

Maritime Heritage Minnesota's focus on the Headwaters Mississippi River will continue and specific suggestions for future maritime historical and nautical archaeological work have been formulated.

- **1. Red Mill Wreck (21-AK0122).** The documentation of this wreck is MHM's priority for Headwaters Mississippi River nautical archaeological research. In order to continue the documentation of this site, certain conditions must be met. Due to the condition of the soft wood the wreck is comprised of, normal underwater excavation using water dredges during normal or high water conditions is not an option for this site. Therefore, any work on the wreck must be conducted during low water and traditional terrestrial techniques will be employed. This stipulation makes scheduling an excavation project difficult because Mississippi River water levels cannot be predicted precisely. MHM would like to establish an endowment dedicated to the investigation of this site that can be utilized during low water conditions.
- **2. *Andy Gibson* (21-AK0109).** MHM will continue condition assessments and the documentation the starboard gunwale of the wreck encased in the riverbank and the central portions of the wreck that are always submerged as funds become available.
- **3. *Walter Taylor*.** Depending on the interpretation and possible identification of the Red Mill Wreck, MHM may or may not continue a search for the *Walter Taylor* wreck. If it is determined that that the Red Mill Wreck is a wanigan or other vessel type, MHM will then search the area to upriver from the wreck toward the wreck of the *Swan*.
- **4. *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton*.** MHM would like to return to the area across and upriver from Clark's Landing to search for the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* wreck. If MHM can secure funds to access a ground penetrating radar unit this research will be conducted.
- **5. *Aitkin's Maritime Sites*.** The *Andy Gibson*, *Swan*, Red Mill Wreck, and the Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and McDonald Saw and Planing Mill site exemplify the richness of the maritime history of the Headwaters Mississippi River than runs through Aitkin. Other archaeological remains have been identified by MHM in the area near the Red Mill Wreck that are part of the G. W. Knox Saw and Planing Mill – the 'old red mill' itself. Other mill remains are located near the Aitkin Campground and are part of the W. A. Rogers Planing Mill or the Illinois Cooperage Company. Evidence of the E. A. Gyde Hoop and Heading Mill probably survive east of the Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and McDonald mill site. The potential for research in Aitkin is evident; the physical remains of the town's past are extensive and accessible. MHM plans to continue researching these sites and the area, possibly resulting in the area gaining recognition as an historic district.

Conclusion

In order to continue investigating Aitkin County's nautical and maritime archaeological sites, MHM will design projects that will utilize both underwater and terrestrial documentation techniques when funding is secured. River water levels are always a consideration in the project design process due to the soft wood Headwaters Mississippi River wrecks are comprised of, particularly since careless excavation can easily destroy these large complex artifacts. Traditional underwater excavation techniques that employ water dredges or airlifts will, in effect, tear apart the wrecks. When using SCUBA, MHM cannot use these methods but careful cleaning of certain areas utilizing the river's current will allow documentation using triangulation, measured drawings, and digital video. In consideration of *Andy Gibson* and the *Red Mill Wreck*, low water conditions will be taken advantage of and trenches will be sunk into the siltbanks and riverbank where appropriate – if funds are available. MHM hopes to establish the Aitkin County Shipwrecks Endowment that would allow the exploitation of low water conditions without extended planning that funding sources like grants require. This endowment would also provide for the rental of a ground penetrating radar until to continue the search for the *City of Aitkin/George H. Houghton* near Clark's Landing.

Maritime Heritage Minnesota's completion of the Aitkin County Shipwrecks Project has added greatly to the knowledge base regarding the Headwaters Mississippi River. Of the four known Mississippi River wrecks in Minnesota, three of them are in Aitkin – *Andy Gibson*, *Swan*, and the *Red Mill Wreck* – and the fourth is the *J.S.* near Battle Axe Island in Houston County. If the *Red Mill Wreck* is a steamer, then Minnesota has four of the seven known steamer sites in the entirety of the Mississippi River, the others being the *War Eagle* in Wisconsin, 'Natchez Watercraft 3' in Mississippi, and '3CT243' in Arkansas. If the *Red Mill Wreck* is a wanigan or other type of vessel, it will be unique among Minnesota's riverine archaeology and history. The data collected during this work allows MHM to expand and augment our collective knowledge of Minnesota's finite submerged and maritime cultural resources. The discovery of the *Red Mill Wreck*, along with the recognition of Tripp Landing and the Burton and Anderson/Hodgeden and McDonald Mill and Landing site further highlights the fact that Minnesota has the richest Mississippi River nautical and maritime history in terms of archaeological sites, and that it is focused hundreds of miles above the widely acknowledged 'head of navigation' of the upper Mississippi – Minneapolis. With further research, the Headwaters Mississippi River will continue to provide Minnesotans with a rich and fascinating story surrounding late 19th and early 20th Century maritime history, riverine transportation, and waterborne commerce.

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